

University of Oklahoma College of Law

University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons

American Indian and Alaskan Native Documents in the Congressional Serial Set: 1817-1899

5-31-1866

Letter of the Secretary of the Interior, to the Chairman of the Committee on Indian Affairs, submitting estimates for deficiencies for the support of destitute Indians in the southern superintendency.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.law.ou.edu/indianserialset>



Part of the [Indian and Aboriginal Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

S. Misc. Doc. No. 116, 39th Cong., 1st Sess. (1866)

This Senate Miscellaneous Document is brought to you for free and open access by University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in American Indian and Alaskan Native Documents in the Congressional Serial Set: 1817-1899 by an authorized administrator of University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. For more information, please contact darinfox@ou.edu.

LETTER
OF THE
SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR,
TO

The chairman of the Committee on Indian Affairs, submitting estimates for deficiencies for the support of destitute Indians in the Southern superintendency.

MAY 31, 1866.—Ordered to be printed; to accompany bill S. No. 348.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
Washington, D. C., May 14, 1866.

SIR: I herewith enclose a copy of a letter of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, dated the 10th instant, submitting estimates, by Superintendent Sells, for deficiencies for the support of destitute Indians in the southern superintendency up to the close of July next, with accompanying papers, viz:

1st. Letter of May 10, 1866, from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior, marked A.

2d. Letter of May 11, 1866, from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior, marked B.

3d. Letter of May 10, 1866, from Superintendent Sells to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, marked C.

4th. Letter of May 8, 1866, from George A. Reynolds, United States Indian agent, to Superintendent Sells, marked D.

5th. Letter of May 1, 1866, from J. Harlan, United States Indian agent, to Superintendent Sells, marked E.

6th. Letter of May 8, 1866, from J. W. Dunn, United States Indian agent, to Superintendent Sells, marked F.

It will be remembered by your honorable committee that the superintendent estimated, as set forth in letter of December 13, 1865, that the sum of one million one hundred and eighty-five thousand three hundred and thirty-one dollars (\$1,185,331) would be necessary to defray these expenses until the close of the first quarter of the present calendar year, \$500,000 of which was provided by Congress. It will be seen that the sum shown to be needed by enclosed estimate, is greater than the difference between former estimate submitted on the 13th of December, 1865, and the appropriation of \$500,000 then made. This is occasioned by including four months in this estimate, in addition to the period heretofore estimated for, and also including the probable expenses for removal and subsistence of certain fragmentary Indian tribes.

The estimate of Superintendent Sells for removal is excluded in the Commissioner's statement of amount needed.

It is hoped that after the first of August next, when the new crop of summer grain and early vegetables will have matured, these Indians will, with the aid

of the interest that will accrue on their invested funds, be able to provide for their own wants, thus relieving the government from extraordinary expenditure on their account.

I have the honor to be, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
JAMES HARLAN, *Secretary.*

Hon. J. R. DOOLITTLE,
Chairman Committee on Indian Affairs, Senate U. S.

A.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, OFFICE INDIAN AFFAIRS,
Washington, D. C., May 10, 1866.

SIR: In compliance with your direction, under date of the 7th instant, I called upon Superintendent Sells, on the 8th, for "an approximate statement of the disbursements made of the funds heretofore placed to his credit not definitely accounted for, and also an estimate of the amount absolutely necessary to prevent starvation and suffering by the Indians of his superintendency up to the close of July next."

On this day Superintendent Sells has submitted the report and estimate called for, which, with the letter accompanying it, I have the honor to transmit herewith.

I also transmit letter of Agent Harlan, dated May 1, and letters of Agents Reynolds and Dunn, dated May 8, 1866, relating to the necessity of the expenditures heretofore made by Superintendent Sells and of a continuance of supplies to the Indians of their respective agencies.

When I became aware of the fact that the expenditures for subsisting and clothing these Indians had exceeded the amount of funds at the disposal of the department applicable to that object, I directed Superintendent Sells to incur no further expenditures in that behalf. I saw no other safe course to pursue; but I feared then, and am certain now, that great suffering will be the result, if steps are not taken to continue the aid of the government to these destitute Indians.

I therefore deem it urgently necessary that funds be placed at the disposal of this department at the earliest day practicable, not only to pay the indebtedness already incurred for their relief, but to enable steps to be taken to prevent actual starvation among the Indians until such time as the crop they are now raising can be made available.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

D. N. COOLEY,
Commissioner.

Hon. JAMES HARLAN,
Secretary of the Interior.

B.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
Office of Indian Affairs, May 11, 1866.

SIR: On the 10th of November last, I had the honor to submit an estimate of funds required to feed and clothe destitute Indians of the southern superintendency for the 4th quarter 1865, and the 1st quarter 1866, and to provide them with agricultural implements and seeds to enable them to provide, after this year, for their own subsistence.

The number of these Indians then requiring subsistence was 30,770, and the

number to be clothed was 32,270. The ravages of war had rendered all these utterly destitute and dependent upon the government for all the necessaries of life.

The amount of funds called for by Superintendent Sells, at the time stated, to support these Indians for six months, was \$1,185,331. This I considered a reasonable sum for the objects in view; but, in submitting the estimate, I reduced the amount to \$1,000,000, thinking that, with economy, this would be sufficient.

In response to this estimate, Congress on the 23d of December, 1865, authorized a transfer of \$500,000 from appropriations remaining unexpended for the suppression of the African slave trade, to the objects for which the funds were then asked.

This sum would not provide subsistence alone for these Indians. It allowed about nine cents per day to each person for the time designated. Winter being upon them, clothing was as necessary to prevent starvation as food.

Of the fund placed at the disposal of the departments for the support of these Indians, \$480,000 were expended by the superintendent, and the residue has been expended by Special Agent E. T. Smith, for provisions furnished the Indians by him at points where no regular agent was stationed.

The statement of Superintendent Sells which I had the honor to transmit to you on the 10th instant, (the day of its receipt,) shows that up to March 1, 1866, he had expended \$227,159 68 more than had up to that time been placed in his hands. The sum of \$50,000 has since been remitted to him, leaving a deficiency of \$177,159 68 up to that date.

The estimate of Superintendent Sells for funds required to cover this deficiency and continue the subsistence of these Indians up to the end of July next, (the time when their crops may become available,) is for \$777,712 18; but, as he credits \$45,000 instead of \$50,000 since March 1, it should be \$772,712 18, as follows:

For deficiency up to March 1, 1866.....	\$177, 159 68
For subsistence for 12,550 loyal Creek Seminoles and Wichitas, from March 1 to July 31, 1866, 153 days @ 15 cents per day, each	343, 102 50
For subsistence for 16,500 Indians of mixed tribes, from March 1 to July 31, 1866, 153 days @ 10 cents per day, each	252, 450 00
	<hr/>
	772, 712 18
	<hr/>

That these Indians are destitute and will really suffer starvation if not provided for by the government, there can be no doubt, and I do not think the necessary relief can be furnished for a less sum than that indicated by the superintendent.

In my communication of the 10th instant, I stated that I had directed Superintendent Sells to discontinue expenditures for the support of these Indians. Although I am assured that they are now suffering for food, I do not feel authorized to revoke this order, until funds are appropriated to meet such expenditures. I cannot, therefore, too strongly urge early action in this matter by Congress.

When human creatures are starving, I cannot hear their complaints with indifference; and I feel strongly the embarrassment of being utterly unable to respond to their calls for assistance.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

D. N. COOLEY, *Commissioner.*

HON. JAMES HARLAN,
Secretary of the Interior.

C.

WASHINGTON, D. C., May 10, 1866.

SIR: In reply to yours of the 8th instant, enclosing communication from the Hon. Secretary of the Interior, I have the honor to state that the accompanying exhibit and estimate covers all the points in the communication of the honorable Secretary as nearly as I have the means in my hands.

A portion of the receipts and vouchers are at my headquarters in Kansas, and hence cannot make a definite statement, but have sent for the papers, and as soon as received will make a full and detailed statement accompanying my report for the first quarter of 1866. For evidence of the absolute necessity of the supplies furnished, I refer you to the accompanying letters of Agents Harlan, Dunn, and Reynolds.

Very respectfully,

ELIJAH SELLS,
Superintendent Indian Affairs.

Hon. D. N. COOLEY,
Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

D.

WASHINGTON, May 8, 1866.

SIR: In reply to your letter dated May 6, 1866, calling for a statement of the necessities that existed for the supplies of provisions and clothing furnished to the Seminoles, and the quality of the goods and supplies furnished under contract, I have the honor to submit the following as my answer: There are now in camp, in the vicinity of Fort Gibson, some fifteen hundred refugee Seminoles and freedmen. Previous to the rebellion they had homes in the Seminole nation; these persons were driven from their homes, and the ravages of war left them entirely dependent upon the bounty of the government for the means to keep them from starvation.

For the past three or four years they have been compelled to stay on Creek and Cherokee lands, with no right to cultivate sufficient lands to raise a necessary supply of grain and farm produce. The unsettled state of their former country has rendered it impracticable to remove them home; acting under the rigid instructions of the department, I have issued them only such supplies and in such quantities as would keep them from want and starvation. These supplies of flour and corn have been issued to the heads of families, so that all should get their equal proportion of the amount furnished us for distribution. The country is almost entirely destitute of grain and beef and the products of the farm, and these defenceless, dependent women and children cannot live save by the bounty of the government.

For the past month nothing has been issued to the Seminoles but flour, and it seems to me sickness and distress will ensue unless a supply of beef and corn is issued to them. These supplies must be continued until crops are raised in the country, or the remnant of the Seminole nation will starve. I have a number of letters in my possession received since my arrival in this city from the acting chief and headmen of the Seminoles, going to show that the goods and clothing furnished them last winter were of a superior quality, and fairly and satisfactorily distributed, though not adequate to supply the absolute necessities of the nation.

But few goods have been supplied them for the last four years, and the amount furnished them under contract made by the Hon. E. Sells, superintendent, has scarcely made them an adequate supply for the present year. I deem it of the utmost importance to humanity that they be furnished with the necessaries of life until crops can be gathered.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

GEO. W. REYNOLDS,

U. S. Indian Agent for Seminoles.

Hon. E. SELLS, *Sup't Indian Affairs.*

E.

WASHINGTON, D. C., *May 1, 1866.*

SIR: Your letter of this date is received, asking my opinion whether the late supply of Indian goods was in excess of the actual wants of the Indians.

I answer, that portion of the goods designed for the Indians at Fort Gibson was delivered in bulk and divided by the several agents *pro rata* to each nation, each being about equally destitute, to the satisfaction of all parties.

This supply was the largest in quantity and the best in quality the Indians have ever received of me, as Indian agent, during the time I have been with them. I do not thereby mean to say that this supply was too large, but that former supplies were in quantity and quality more grossly deficient than this one.

The Cherokees as a nation were wealthy before the war. Some of them could indulge in the luxuries and many more could command all the necessaries of life. Some were poor and lived as they could. The war equalized them, not by elevating the poor, but by depressing the rich. They were, almost without exception, reduced to one common level of total destitution. They were stripped of everything an Indian could eat, wear, use or sell, and too often literally left naked, and always nearly so. They were in want of everything. It required a vast amount of clothing (more than they ever had) to supply their actual necessities. Even the last supply, large as it was, I am prepared to say, fell far short of a sufficiency to prevent great suffering through the last winter.

I have been nearly four years Cherokee Indian agent, and have lived with and among them, and I ought to know, and I think I do, their wants, deprivations, destitution, sufferings, and what have been their supplies of food and clothing. From what I know I think I can safely say that the late supply fell far below their actual wants and necessities, and not one-half enough for common comforts of life even among the very poor in our land. In a great country, governed by Christians, the exact point where freezing and starvation begins, and when human nature can bear no more and live, should not be precisely ascertained and fixed as the utmost limits to its bounty. I think suffering should be prevented. The most the Indians have received has been too small to do that.

Respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. HARLAN,

United States Indian Agent.

Colonel E. SELLS,

Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Southern Superintendency.

F.

WASHINGTON, D. C., *May 8, 1866.*

SIR: In reply to your letter bearing date of May 6, 1866, asking for a statement of the condition of the Indians in the Creek Agency, and the necessity that existed for the supplies of clothing and provisions furnished them under contract, and the quality of the goods, I respectfully submit the following an-

swer thereto: In the spring of 1865 almost all of the able-bodied men of this tribe were in the service of the United States, and were not discharged as soldiers until it was too late to put in crops, and those that did plant, did so mostly in the bottoms near Fort Gibson, the country being so unsettled that it was dangerous to go far into the country from that military post. These crops were almost entirely destroyed by the heavy freshets of July and August of that year. My reports to you in detail show you the condition of the country during the year 1865. Such being the condition of the country, and the large numbers returning to their former homes of those lately in rebellion, made the supplies absolutely necessary, and the amounts furnished by you were scarcely enough to meet the pressing wants of the hungry and starving. I am now supplying, with such provisions as have been furnished, more than twelve thousand persons. These provisions are issued to heads of families, and only in such quantities as is necessary to keep them from want.

The clothing was of a good quality and satisfactorily issued. The amount was not sufficient to supply all with wearing apparel for the present year, but enough to meet their immediate pressing wants. My information from the Creek nation goes to show that all of the tribe are industriously at work putting in crops to enable themselves to become again self-sustaining, and I regard it as absolutely necessary that they should be furnished with provisions until their crops are ready for the harvest.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. W. DUNN,

United States Indian Agent.

Hon. ELIJAH SELLS,

Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Washington, D. C.